

Life and Work.

WHAT A PRAYER MEETING SHOULD BE.

A good, common-sense paper is the following by Rev. Dr. Williams of Baltimore, in the "Presbyterian Journal." May it prove helpful to the prayer meetings of our Church in Canada:—

"It is, of course, a religious meeting. But it differs from the usual Sabbath-day service, and also from many other meetings held in the house of God.

"It has a character of its own, and ought to be the means of preparing the people for the other exercises of the sanctuary.

"It is a place for the 'expression' of religious thought and feeling by the people. In the regular service of the church these are expressed by one person, the minister, except in the singing.

"In the prayer-meeting the people are invited to take part in the exercises. They can sing, they can pray, they can read the Scriptures or a suitable article of a religious character, or speak directly to the people on some religious topic.

"When the people avail themselves of these privileges, the idea of a prayer-meeting conducted by one person it cannot be strictly called a prayer-meeting. The prayer-meeting, as we understand it, requires several persons to take part, at least more than one.

"It is the people's meeting, not merely in the sense of the people being present, but in the sense that the people conduct it. They maintain and keep it up. The people's thoughts and emotions find expression in this meeting. For this reason it becomes an index to the condition of the church. The minister can tell by it where his people stand spiritually. If there be no prayer-meeting he is in the dark. If that meeting be poorly attended or languishes, he knows that the religious life of the church is not very great. Where its privileges are appreciated, we see a church life that is vigorous and strong.

"In such a meeting the thoughts of God's people find expression in instruction, in counsel, in encouragement. Their feelings find expression in gratitude, in reverence and in love to God and one another.

"Such a meeting, where mind and heart find utterance in devout expression, is worshipful. Indeed, purer, more earnest worship may be the outcome of the prayer-meeting than of the more stately service of the sanctuary.

"But the prayer-meeting is not only a place for the expression of religious thoughts and feelings, but also a place for the impression of religious thoughts.

"Almost everyone who has been a regular attendant upon the prayer-meeting remembers very distinctly, not only persons who took part and the subjects before the meetings, but very decided convictions, the product of those meetings.

"An author of some distinction says one incident of his childhood he never forgot. A good old deacon prayed, 'Lord help us to remember what we ought to remember.'

"The words of laymen come to us sometimes with more power than the words of ministers. In the absence of ministers, laymen have carried on protracted meetings, which have resulted in many conversions. Instances are very many in which their words spoken in the prayer-meeting have made deep and lasting impressions. Here is a field for work, when humbly accepted, as fruitful as any other, and we may well pray, in these times of coldness and indifference; that the pious laymen would come and use the opportunity which is offered them.

Not only do the words of earnest, pious laymen have weight in the prayer-meeting, but coming, as they do, when mind and heart, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are seeking expression, there is a power in them that is calculated to make impressions of a lasting character.

"Since there is so much undeveloped good in the prayer-meeting, the people should strive to attend. It ought to be in all our churches far more than it is. If this should be made what it is capable of being made we would not need so many other agencies, some of them of doubtful character, to keep up the interest in the church. It would give new life to the church and fresh power to the preaching, and bring multitudes of precious souls into the kingdom of God.

"The people should attend not only, but should be ready, under the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to assist in the meeting. To this end the laymen should be ready to offer prayer, to speak briefly and to the point, to make a suitable quotation from the Bible, or to sing a hymn, and do whatever may be for the edification of God's people."

You never can tell when God will take a little word you may drop, like an arrow shot at a venture, and cause it to strike some hearer between the joints of the harness and bring him down. Therefore, let no opportunity slip for speaking a word for Christ.—Rev. A. F. Schauffler.